The stories of 1 Samuel, full of intrigue and violence and genuine piety, have provoked and stymied readers for centuries. Today’s publishing bonanza centering on David and the evolution of the Deuteronomistic History and its constituent parts has only accentuated that fascination. Campbell’s new commentary, a welcome development of the author’s co-written work *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History*, deservedly takes its place in the long line of works by authors bearing names as Driver, Wellhausen, McCarter, Stoebe, and Brueggemann.

Following the format of the Forms of the Old Testament Literature series, this volume opens with a chapter on “The Overall Shape of 1-2 Samuel,” concludes with an analytical chapter on “Diachronic Dimension: From Past Texts to Present Texts” exploring the stages of the book leading to its final state within the Deuteronomistic History and beyond, and in the middle includes eight chapters, each addressing the major units of the book. An “Introduction” offering basic orientations to form criticism and the content of 1-2 Samuel guides both novice and scholarly readers in the volume’s use. A succinct, helpful glossary of thirty-two genres concludes the work. Campbell treats each major unit by identifying its subunits, outlining each one, and then for each pericope explores problems under discrete headings: “textual issues” (limited text-critical problems),
“discussion” (of overarching literary or occasionally historical issues), “genre,” “setting,” and “meaning” (by which Campbell apparently means literary purpose or rhetorical aim). Other headings appear irregularly.

It will be useful to analyze an example of Campbell’s interpretive work, which is on the whole convincing owing to its sensibly middle-of-the-road interpretations of the controverted historical and literary issues. Campbell, following most scholars since the nineteenth century, identifies 7:2–12:25 as a unit describing the rise of the monarchy. Recognizing a range of sources of varying dates (including post-Josianic Deuteronomistic History), he understands the unit as “the base for political and theological discussion” bearing the marks of varying perspectives on the monarchy” (89). The complex is a “composite narrative,” that is, one “holding together in a single composition a variety of conflicting traditions” (131). Taking refuge in irreducible complexity, Campbell nevertheless analyzes the constituent parts of the complex and their relationships at redactional stages with great sophistication. While it is possible to quibble with his claim that most of 1 Sam 12 is post–Deuteronomistic History (why not pre–Deuteronomistic History, granting that Deuteronomistic History touches are minimal) or that the so-called antimonarchic material in 8:1–22 and 10:17–27 was added to the early story by the post-Josianic redactor of the Deuteronomistic History, the reading on offer must be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Let us tighten the focus: when turning to 1 Sam 8 (96–104), Campbell addresses the interesting question of why the מֵשֶׁט מֶלך does not include bribery, a common topic in ancient Near Eastern discussions of appropriate kingship and the presenting problem triggering the request for kingship. He also examines the paradox that, according to Samuel, YHWH disapproved of kingship but accepted it. He succinctly argues that the genre of the chapter is “reported story.” In discussing the text’s setting, he surmises that the traditions in 1 Sam 8 may have originated out of early experience with monarchy before their being incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History.

Campbell’s treatment of this pericope, and indeed of all of 1 Sam 7–12, lands squarely within the scholarly discussion of the past century and a quarter. He has cited all the appropriate parallels and antecedents and offered a competent, if cursory, form-critical positioning of the pericope. What is absent, however, is any significant advance over previous scholarship. We miss an extension of form-critical concerns into the larger unit. Once someone has formed the complex 7:2–12:25, what are the genre and setting of this new unit? What is its Sitz im Leben (not merely its Sitz im Literatur)? Arguably, this marks simply a limitation of form criticism itself, but one that numerous scholars, including Campbell himself in other works, have worked to overcome. One of the canons
of the book reviewer is that an author cannot be blamed for not doing what he or she did not set out to do, but surely this is a case of missed opportunities.

Martin Buss in his *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context* (JSOTSup 274; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) has recently invited form critics to ask what human issues the texts under consideration might be raising and who might be raising them (that is, what social strata are reflected in the text). Certainly 1 Samuel explores issues of power and legitimacy, the nature of heroism and friendship, among other universal human topics. That is, the texts offer a window onto ancient Israelite understandings of human existence and thus perspectives relevant to us who ask the same questions. One wishes for broader reflections on the setting of the constituent forms of 1 Samuel in Campbell’s work. Campbell does argue that the underlying problem the book seeks to address is that David has become king (and therefore most of the text arose during his reign or within a century or so of it [315, 319, 325–26]) but rarely pushes that insight toward an analysis of the social world generating the texts. His work offers a reading of 1 Samuel that is invariably competent and informed and often compelling in its sophisticated elegance, but we miss important dimensions of the text by not relentlessly pursuing the question of who transmitted these traditions and why.

To summarize, then, Campbell’s work masterfully examines the literary shape of 1 Samuel and carefully traces how the shape changes through the various redactions the book underwent. On the whole, this reading is convincing. Students and scholars alike will profit from the book, which is well-written enough to be read straight through (a rare virtue among biblical commentaries). While the restrictions of the format of the FOTL series force readers to go elsewhere for philological, historical, or text-critical issues (all important topics in the study of 1 Samuel), Campbell’s literary analysis is unsurpassed in English. We are all in his debt.